

ABSOLUTE MONOTHEISM VERSUS GATHIC MONOTHEISM

Dr. Kersey Antia, Mar 20, 2020

In *Theodicy in the World of the Bible*, Antti Laato and J.C. de Moor (Brill, Leiden, 2003) observe: The possibility of a power preventing him (Yahweh) coming to the aid of the supplicant is never taken into serious consideration.

Apparently the strong theological bias of the Jerusalemite Temple theology which interpreted prosperity or misfortune as the presence or absence of YHWH prevented Jewish theology to adopt any dualistic interpretive models. If Isa. 45.7 was directed against Persian dualism this constitutes some evidence that Persian dualistic thinking has been influential in the apocalyptic thinking of the second Temple Judaism. This influence can even be seen from later biblical texts where the personified evil Satan took the role previously attributed to YHWH. Footnote 55 adds: There is a long scholarly discussion of the monistic theology or demonic nature of YHWH. The basic study was P. Volz, *Das Damonische in Jahwe* (SGV, 110), Tubingen 1924. In recent studies scholars have become more cautious to speak about the demonic side of YHWH. See e.g., F. Lindstrom, *God and the Origin of Evil: A Contextual Analysis of Alleged Monistic Evidence in the Old Testament* (CB.OT 37), Lund 1983; A.S. Van der Woude (ed.), *Prophets, Worship and Theodicy: Studies in Prophetism, Biblical Theology and Structural and Rhetorical Analysis and on the Place of Music in Worship* (OTS, 23), Leiden 1984, 120-136. Nevertheless, the fact is that we do have examples in the Old Testament where 'evil' is attributed to YHWH himself (see Illman's article on Job and Korpel's contribution on Ruth) and that these passages have been regarded as difficult interpretive problems already in ancient Judaism. Philo is a good example among early Jewish interpreters who attempted to explain such difficult Old Testament passages. See further Runia's contribution in this volume.

Another 'dualistic' inroad, "note these authors," on the Jewish-Christian heritage came from Greek philosophy which was combined with certain ancient mythical motifs found in the Old Testament itself. The basic idea in ancient Greek philosophy was that the deity is absolutely good and, therefore, cannot have anything to do with death. This led to dualistic viewpoints in theology and such a theology was easy to connect with 'dualistic' features in the Old Testament. For example, David Winston has argued in his contribution that the Wisdom of Solomon contains such 'dualistic' theology even though he at the same time notes that the author of this ancient text was well aware of the

monotheistic nature of his religion. In a similar way David Runia argues that Philo's monotheistic theology contains traces of 'dualism'.

Even though Judaism places utmost emphasis on absolute monotheism, it does not make for an absolutely logical system at times as pointed out by D.S. Winston's comments on the wisdom of Solomon:

For a Jewish sage, however, to insist that not only was death not part of the original divine design for humanity, but that it is some sort of primeval entity that was not entirely subject to God, one that the impious summoned through word and deed, and with whom they concluded a pact, as being worthy to be members of his party (1:16), is hardly compatible with the biblical monotheism to which he was heir. Yet Wis.'s (Wisdom of Solomon's) evocation here clearly goes far beyond mythological overtones.

Winston finds it even more disconcerting to read there that 'it was through the devil's envy that Death came into the cosmic order, and they who are his own experience him.' It is hard to imagine that he is literally referring to a supernatural 'accuser' or 'adversary' such as appears in Zech. 3:1-10, Job 1-2, and 1 Chron. 21:1, or even to the snake of Gen.3. The author's philosophical orientation must obviously preclude the ascription of human evil to the envy of such an otherworldly being. It may well be that the Zoroastrian motif of the devil's envy as the origin of death had penetrated Jewish circles in Alexandria and Palestine in the first century CE, when it appears both in the Book of Wisdom in Wis. And the Life of Adam and Eve (12-17; cf. 2 En.31).

Thus, absolute monotheism is not devoid of problems of logicity which Gathic monotheism seems to have resolved, unlike the later post-Sasanian Pahlavi dualism which rather seems to be a response to meet the threat posed by the new ruler's belief in absolute monotheism as already reviewed.

Where the wicked and the just are thought to be able to witness each other's reversed roles under the new divine dispensation, the righteous are pictured as taking their stand with poised confidence to outface their former oppressors, who, in turn, are depicted as full of remorse and given to self-deprecating monologues. Sexual sin, whether intentional or inadvertent, was believed to result in sterility.